

of services. Of the 89 judges responding, 99 percent said that counsel was secured for eligible defendants in what they considered to be a reasonable amount of time. With respect to the quality of legal representation provided by federal public defenders, 96 percent of the judges rated the services as very good or better. Private panel attorneys appointed under the program, however, were not rated as highly by the judges, with 65 percent of the judges ranking the quality of services provided by them as falling below that furnished by the federal public defenders.

These results indicate that, despite high praise for the program, there is a need for improvement, particularly with respect to the panel attorneys. The Judiciary is taking steps to address this need. For example, the Judiciary's fiscal year 2000 appropriations request includes funds to implement a 1986 congressionally authorized compensation rate of \$75 per hour for panel attorneys to attract experienced and well-qualified counsel.

In the future, the Judiciary plans to expand on the above and gather additional performance information to assist with managing the program.

IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROBATION AND PRETRIAL SERVICES SYSTEM

The Third Branch has an essential law enforcement role in addition to its fundamental mission of providing for the fair resolution of matters brought to federal court. It is responsible for supervising offenders serving sentences in the community, individuals released from prison on supervised release, and persons charged with offenses released to the community pending adjudication. Further, it conducts investigations of convicted offenders and persons charged with criminal offenses, and prepares reports to assist with sentencing and with decisions related to pretrial release and detention. Several initiatives to improve the effectiveness of the probation and pretrial services system are underway.

Comprehensive Review of System

In fiscal year 1999, the Judiciary plans to hire an outside consultant to conduct a comprehensive study of the probation and pretrial services system. The consultant will analyze current programs, identify strategic issues, and make recommendations for the future direction of the system.

The study will involve an examination of the investigatory and supervisory components of the system, including pretrial investigations, reports, and supervision; presentence investigations and reports; offender supervision; and the witness security program. It will include an assessment of all relevant programs such as drug testing, substance abuse and mental health treatment, home confinement, and the collection of fines and restitution. The review will examine program mission, goals, and objectives; program functions and work activities; required technical expertise; the use of automation; program costs; policies, standards, and guidelines; national program support, communications, and oversight roles; district level operations and services; organizational responsibilities and relationships; and governing statutes and regulations. The study will include input from key individuals in the judicial, executive, and legislative branches.

The Judiciary decided to conduct this study because the system is increasing in complexity, growing in size, and facing changing needs. For example, over the years, the system has adapted to major legislative changes in bail, sentencing guidelines, and responsibilities related to fines and restitution; expanded federal jurisdiction; shifting prosecutorial policies; and new technologies for supervising offenders. Further, the composition of the federal offender supervision population has changed dramatically, posing greater risks to the community than before, and program needs and costs for substance abuse and mental health treatment are growing.

The Judiciary expects the study to produce recommendations for improving both the efficiency and quality of the system.

Mobile Computing

In April 1998, the Judiciary completed a two-site study on the use of mobile computing for probation and pretrial services officers performing supervision and investigation activities. Having found numerous advantages to mobile computing, over the next several years the Judiciary will be providing these capabilities to probation and pretrial services offices around the country.

With mobile computing, officers can use hand-held computers equipped with

an electronic pen that substitutes for a mouse and keyboard. Specially developed software will give officers immediate access to information about individuals under supervision. Further, officers can make electronic records of field activities and transmit and receive data to and from the office.

The Judiciary's study found that mobile computing will increase the productivity of probation and pretrial services officers by reducing the amount of time officers spend traveling to and from the office to obtain or provide information, and eliminating data entry of hand-written or dictated field notes. This will allow officers to concentrate on critical investigation and supervision work.

ENHANCING THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF COURT PROCEEDINGS

The Judiciary continues working on several automation initiatives to enhance the quality and efficiency of court proceedings. A summary of notable efforts follows.

Courtroom Technologies

The Judiciary is following a multi-year plan to equip courtrooms with a variety of technologies to facilitate judicial proceedings. The plan's highest priority is to include some level of courtroom technology in every new construction and renovation project.

The technologies include video evidence presentation systems, videoconferencing capabilities, electronic court-reporting systems that provide immediate access to the record, and courtroom access to information via external applications and databases. From June 1997 through June 1998, the Judiciary studied the benefits of these technologies through usage logs, questionnaires, monthly reports, and interviews of a number of courts using one or more of the technologies. Results show that the technologies can reduce trial time, lower litigation costs, improve fact-finding, enhance understanding of information, and improve access to court proceedings.